

Fredericktown: A Victory among Neighbors

Missouri, a divided state used the strength of Soldiers from neighboring Illinois to squash Confederate plans to weaken Union control of the state.

Confederate General M. Jeff Thompson headed back to camp fresh from battle with 3,000 troops. Upon entering Fredericktown, he found panicked citizens. The southern sympathizers warned him that Union Soldiers had amassed in his camp. Thompson eventually gave up after hours of inquiring about the union strength and disposition. He decided to devise a trap for the Union Soldiers.

Thompson faced Union Lieutenant Colonel W.E. Panabaker, commander of the 11th Missouri and Colonel Joseph Plummer, overall commander of Union troops. The numbers vary, however the Union slightly outnumbered the Confederates. Under the Union flag, the 17th and 20th Illinois were led by Colonel Leonard F. Ross and Colonel C.C. Marsh respectively. In addition, Colonel William Carlin commanded a Union column that included the 21st, 33rd, and 38th Illinois Infantry Regiments along with units from Wisconsin, Indiana, and Missouri.

As the 17th moved forward, the 20th Illinois and 11th Missouri formed columns on both sides. Illinois Soldiers faced their foe as the Confederates popped out of the cornfield with an agonizing volley of fire. The Confederate plan caved, when Colonel Aden Lowe failed to fall back, pulling the Union Army into the planned ambush. Instead, after the smoke cleared, Lowe's lifeless body was discovered on the field. Thompson's Confederates had retreated twenty-six miles. The Confederates declared the battle a defeat.

Colonel Plummer reported 158 Confederate dead, thirty-eight wounded and eighty captured. According to Plummer, Union dead totaled six with sixty wounded. Among the one death and three wounded from the 11th Missouri three were from Illinois. The single fatality, SGT Richard Smith of Company F, hailed from Xenia, Illinois and worked as a married 44-year-old shoemaker. Before the war 23-year-old Charles Clark of Company A and 21-year-old Daniel Gantz of Company C were both farmers from Sumner and Mechanicsburg respectively. Both Soldiers were treated and returned to duty with the 11th.

Illinois, a patriot state in 1861, quickly filled their state quota. However, more Soldiers clamored to join. In the initial stage of the war, the state could not monetarily support more units. Neighboring Missouri also had a problem. They did not have enough Soldiers to fill their Union quota as the state was split in half and contained many southern sympathizers. This problem resolved itself when Union Missouri recruiters traveled to Illinois. They had no problem filling their ranks. In all 5,610 Illinois Soldiers served under Missouri Union banners. These Soldiers are claimed by both states. Their rosters can be found in the Illinois state archives online database.